TL 1746

Reading the Unwritten:
An Anatomy of Indonesian Discourse on East Timor

A Short Lecture at the 5th Symposium of Oporto University on East Timor
July 22-29, 1993, Portugal

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Introduction

A question often asked to students of Indonesian studies in discussions on East Timor is why Indonesia clings so to the "integration" of East Timor with Indonesia. Several reasons are usually given.

The first is Indonesia's territorial ambition, which some might be tempted to combine with Javanese expansionism. The second is a fear of political instability in the region, a reason often found in official Indonesian discourse justifying the take-over. The third is fear of the emergence of a "communist" state in Indonesia's backyard. The fourth has to do with economic motives, wanting to get hold of Timor's oil and other natural resources.

While all these are true, many of us feel they are not sufficient. What concerns us here is how the "integration" is justified in Indonesian thinking. The "integration" rhetoric is produced and consumed, consciously or unconsciously, through government documents and mass media, by Indonesians and non-Indonesians. At the bottom of the rhetoric lies a grammar which enables those who share it to understand what is meant and implied. Ultimately this amounts to a shared illusion. But this illusion is powerful and indeed has become an obsesssion in Indonesian elitist thought. The following analysis is an attempt to outline, so to speak, this grammar of Indonesian "integration" rhetoric. By so doing I aim to present the problems of contemporary Indonesian ideology which form an obstacle for a rational understanding of the East Timorese cause.

Elements of Contemporary Indonesian Ideology

It is not difficult to pinpoint the major ideological features of contemporary Indonesia. They are anti-communism, absolute-developmentalism, family-statism or state-corporatism and unitarism. All these are very prominent in daily Indonesian political communication. What we have here is a linguistic fetishism. Indeed political vocabularies or slogans coined by the regime are a loyalty test, and in this linguistic game dissidents are in an extremely disadvantaged position because they know that any violation of the grammar rules can result in punishment, physical or psychological.

Anti-communism: Communism is banned under the New Order regime and former communists, their sympathizers and family members as "ex-tapol" (ex-political prisoners) or potential dissidents who are not "environmentally clean" (bersih lingkungan) are ideological outcasts. The authorities from time to time stress the "latent danger" of

communism and call for a more solid national unity to block the infiltration of communism.

Absolute-developmentalism: Development is the ultimate fetish of the New Order. Nothing can defeat this King in the game. The Indonesian word for development, "pembangunan", is literally "building" and in fact "development" in Indonesia means the building of roads, bridges, harbors, schools, hospitals, factories and other infrastructures. The Indonesian word for development could have been "perkembangan" (development), a word which readily suggests cultural and spiritual development as well as physical building.

Family-statism: The analogy between the state and the family is not uncommon in the patriarchal perception of the state. In Indonesia the President is the Father and the first lady the Mother. President Sukarno is the Father of the Revolution, and President Suharto is the Father of Development. The citizens are children. Recent mounting critisism against human rights is regarded as outside interference in "the family affairs of a neibor."

Unitarism: "Unity and integrity" (persatuan dan kesatuan) is a slogan frequently used by military leaders. The concept of federation is very unpopular among Indonesian nationalists because it is associated with the colonialist "divide and rule" and the Dutch conspiracy during the independence war to maintain its influence in the archipelago. Vice-President Try Sutrisno recently reminded his fellow Indonesians not to forget the element of "unity" (kesatuan) in refering to Indonesia and suggested the correct full name of the country should be "Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia" (Unitary Indonesian Republic State). (Kompas, April 20, 1993)

Decoding Indonesian Discourse on East Timor

Careful reading of official statements, news reports and essays makes us aware of the following underlying themes in the "integration" rhetoric.

1. Communist-phobia

In the rhetoric, Fretilin is the source of all the troubles in East Timor. It has been described as GPK or security disruptors who burn or ransack houses, kill innocent people and fan frustrated youth to oppose Indonesia. Fretilin are communists, and therefore the enemy of the nation. They must be eliminated without mercy.

In news reports, Xanana and other independence fighters or activists are almost without exception identified as Fretilin, even after Xanana declared that he had left Fretilin to become the chairman of the CNRM and supreme commander of Falintil. Xanana is always the Fretilin leader (gembong Fretilin). The word "gembong" (leader, champion, figure) has vulgar connotations and is used in combinations like "gembong gerombolan" (leader of a gang).

Whether Indonesia's avoidance of Xanana's title is intentional or not is still unclear. But in any case the influence this has on foreign mass media is by no means small.

To be fair I must say the continual use of the name Fretilin instead of CNRM and Falintil is still common among foreign journalists and news services such as Reuter, AFP,

UPI and many others. Reuter once filed an item calling for the correction of the name, pointing out that Xanana is no longer a Fretilin member, but Reuter itself continued to use Fretilin even after that. (Reuter, December 2, 1992)

But while in the foreign media there is confusion about the name of the resistance, the use of Fretilin in the Indonesian media appears to be quite consistent.

Once TEMPO December 5 issue (p. 26) explained about the establishement of CNRM and the fact that Xanana went out of Fretilin. But it is TEMPO itself that continues to neglect this explanation in subsequent reports.

The word Fretilin means all that oppose Indonesia in East Timor. The repeated use of Fretilin in the following passage about the Santa Cruz massacre shows how much the media is concerned with Fretilin. Fretilin is given a special status as if it represents the whole resistance.

"They (demonstrators) carried anti-Indonesia posters, flags of Portugal *and Fretilin*, or pictures of *Fretilin* figure Xanana Gusmao. Why were they agnry? Is it true they are *Fretilin*?" (TENPO, November 30, 1991, p. 30. Italic by the author.)

"Shouts of 'Viva Xanana, Viva *Fretilin*' were often heard. Xanana Gusmao is a figure of the outlawed party in East Timor *Fretilin* who had been persued by our troops." (TEMPO November 23, 1991, p. 22. Italic by the author.)

"Another group of rioteers were standing on the cemetery wall, unfurling anti-integration banners and posters like *Fretilin* flags which they had prepared." (Suara Pembaruan, November 30, 1991. Caption for the Bub Muntz' photo at the entrance of the cemetery 15 minutes before the massacre. Italic by the author.)

In 1974 and 1975, the main concern of the Indonesian media regarding East Timor was whether Fretilin were communists or not. Indonesian interviewers very frankly asked, for examples, Jose Ramos-Horta, if he was a Marxist. He denied it but his answer seems not to have convinced them. Subsequently the Indonesian intelligence waged a propaganda war attacking Fretilin as communists. Being a communist, or being labelled so, is an ideological sin in Indonesia. There is no way for people so labelled to defend themselves and they are targets of harrasment by the authorities.

This anti-communist paranoia continues to this day, has become, in fact. more deeply rooted in the society. "Communists" now are no more Communist Party members and sympathizers as in the past, but are people considered anti-development, anti-government, ant-Pancasia and so on. The word communist causes a Pavlof-like reflex among people.

One Japanese tourist to Indonesia was told by an Indonesian soldier who had served in East Timor that he had eaten a chunk of flesh of an East Timorese during his duty there. He burned the flesh by the flame of a candle for about thirty minutes and ate it until he was satisfied. The Indonesian soldier did not appear to feel guilty for this. He said, "It's the flesh of a communist, so no problem."

In Indonesia, the persistant use of the term Fretilin is for reason. What is implied here is that the present "troubles" stem from the "civil war" of 1975 (UDT coup and a subsequent battle between Fretilin and UDT), that those who oppose Indonesia are members of only one party. By this means Indonesian officialdom is attempting to conceal the development of East Timorese nationalism, and the fact that the leadership of the resistance is no longer a political party but a national umbrella organization under which parties and activist groups are united with nationalist sentiments. The names CNRM and Falintil linguistically represent this new situation. But for Indonesia, those still fighting are "remnants" of the old colonial residue, and the opposition has been declining without popular support. A new development of the resistance should not exist. This is why for Indonesia these names are unacceptable and Fretilin or GPK must continue to be used.

2. They dont' know what they do

East Timor is always refered to as the youngest-child province (propinsi bungsu) or the youngest province (propinsi termuda). And as we all know, children don't know what they are actually saying. They express frustration in radical ways. They are easily excited by others. They must be protected..... TEMPO November 23 issue writes:

"East Timor, the youngest-child province of the Republic of Indonesia, now 15 years old, is indeed in depression. The father (sang ayah) perhaps needs to treat him with more care."

Who is the father of East Timor? Indonesia, the Indonesians, or the Indonesian government?

This paternalistic theme can be found in an article which appeared in TEMPO November 30 issue, "The East Timorese, Our Brothers" written by Edhir Djatmiko and Mubyarto. The writers were members of the Gajah Mada research team whose report suggested many reforms for East Timor.

The article says, while "they (the youth) can think in a reasonably rational way," they "get political education from former activists of factions with different opinions." Moreover, "foreign radio broadcasts which tend to be anti-integration are their daily fare," "the youth groups are prominent in bravely expressing what has become troubles in their thoughts (beban pikiran)" and "they are easily mobilized." This is why the Catholic church can best understand the youth's aspirations "although the tradition of the East Timorese Catholic church was basically only to think about spiritual life."

As a remedy for these frustrated young hearts, they propose to revive a kind of traditional forum of decision making in which day-to-day probelms, individual or communal, were solved under the leadership of a traditional chief.

But it is a misunderstanding to say that the youth are not aware of what they are doing. They know that what they are doing can endanger their lives. They know that they are engaged in an independence movement. It is true that many of young activists are teenagers or in their twenties. But most independence movements after World War II were

carried out by that generation almost without exception.

Another misunderstanding is that the frustration of the youth can be cooled through a traditional deliberative meeting. Why the scholars assume this is still unclear. Do they think that the youths' frustration is caused by a communication gap between the old and the young, or do they believe that the elders can play a more effective role in controlling the young than the state apparatus can?

In any case, the reviving of such a traditional political system is unreailstic and will never contribute to the cooling of young nationalistic sentiments. The resistance is wide-spread among the educated, and normally the educated new generation does not look back to their old-fashioned social system for guidance.

It is not only the youth but also the whole population that are regarded as unconscious of what they are doing.

Careful reading of a description of the Santa Cruz demonstration in TEMPO November 23 issue makes us aware of the reflection of this thinking in the text. The demonstrators are described differently as "congregation" (jemaah) when still at the Matael church, then "group" (rombongan) when approaching the city center, and then "mass" (massa) after turning at the Governor office. And the mass is described as "confused" (kacau), "panic" (panik), "hysteric" (histeris), "screaming increasingly piercely" (teriakan kian nyaring) and so on. The description as a whole gives readers the impression that it was an uncontrolled burst of the frustrated and hysteric mass.

This sharply contradicts the claim by East Timorese and foreign witnesses that the demonstration was peaceful and diciplined.

Sceptism with respect to democracy or goverment by the people is a prevailing ideology among the Indonesian elite. Indonesian democracy or Pancasila democracy is a democracy led by the wisdom (of whom?). Kristiadi, a staff member of the Indonesian military think-tank CSIS, once wrote:

"In keeping with its decolonisation policies, Portugal provided the people of East Timor with the opportunity to establish political parties. This opportunity however has actually harmed the people of East Timor since the level of their education was very limited and they were still faced with the more fundamental problems of meeting their daily basic needs and did not yet need political parties. ..... For that reason the aspirations of the people could not be channeled through such modern political institutions." (Kristiadi, 'The Decolonization of East Timor: A Historical Review,' in *Indonesian Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, 1986, CSIS)

On the other hand what Indonesia claims to have been the act of self-determination in East Timor was an assembly of some thirty-seven Timorese local chiefs arbitrarily picked by Indonesian intelligence. Though this is a total farce in international eyes, in Indonesian elitist thinking it was nothing to be shamed of.

3. Development, not self-determination

T. Mulya Lubis, himself a prominent human rights lawyer and proponent of democracy, in an article on the Santa Cruz massacre in the November 23 issue of TEMPO, writes that political self-determination is not necessary for the East Timorese because there is emerging among the population a new idea of "independence" (merdeka) which is more socio-economical (read "development") than political. He quotes the following passage from the above-mentioned Gajah Mada report.

"..... the common understanding of independence is more simple and practical. It leaves political questions aside and asks how far can one realise one's social and economic aspirations. Corlea, a temukung (traditional leader) in a village proudly and frankly stated that he had become a free (merdeka) person. His reason was simple enough. He had been able to replace his house of straw thatch (a symbol of a colonised people) with a house with cement walls, a manifestation of freedom (kemerdekaan)."

Then he continues:

"Here independence has a different meaning, and what is clear is that it does not have the same tune as the meaning of self-determination. This new interpretation of independence must be studied further and must be given a clearer content in the sense of giving the right to self-determination in regard to the pattern and the form of the economy they choose and the cultural and customary particularities. Therefore, not in the sense of becoming a separate country like the classic interpretation of international law. ..... it is more appropriate that the question of East Timor is seen in the context of our diversity and the new interpretation of self-determination is seen as efforts to maintain that diversity."

Lubis' argument, by implication, is pinting to the autonomy option for East Timor. Since agreeing to the independence of East Timor would be subversive in Indonesia, the autonomy option is perhaps the most realistic solution for the reformists to talk about. But that is not what we are concerned with here, rather we are concerned with unconcious representations of Indonesian thinking in its discourse.

The article begins by refering to the territory as the youngest province (provinsi termuda) and calling the Timorese as brothers (saudara-saudara). Reading the motivation for the demonstration, it says, "it is possible that the victims did not know that they endangered order."

The most interesting point in his article is the use of the word "giving" (pemberian). Here the right to self-determination, political or cultural, is seen as something which is "given". But the right to self-determination belongs to the East Timorese in the first place, and is indeed, most people would say, their inalienable right. It is only a matter of others, notably Indonesia, recognizing and respecting it. The same can be said for other human rights. It is rather surprising, therefore, to see a prominent human rights specialist talk about these rights as something "given" (by the authorities).

In connection with this point, the recent Indonesian human rights theory about the universality of human rights and the relativity of the implementation of them is interesting. It

asserts that while human rights are universal their implementation can vary according to each country's background. Here human rights are seen as something *external* to a man to be *implemented* (by the authorities) , and not, as we usually think, something *inherent* to be *realized*.

4. Fear of disintegration

It is necessary to understand how difficult it is for Indonesian nationalism to think that East Timor is not Indonesia. In Indonesian nationalist thinking, East Timor "has returned" to the Fatherland Indonesia after hundreds of years of separation caused by western colonialism. While it can be rationally argued that East Timor was never a part of Indonesia, the innermost sentiment of Indonesian nationalism would regard such an argument as a neo-colonialist excuse. And the "Indonesia" that included East Timor was an imaginary community that is non-historical and immanently-united. This is an illusion but a very strong one because it lies at the foundation of people's unconscience.

Indonesia's official English pamphlet, *Decolonization in East Timor*, starts the chapter of history of East Timor by the following passage.

"Prior to the arrival of the colonial powers, Timor had been part of the Sriwijaya and Mojopahit Empires which successively dominated much of Southeast Asia for nearly one thousand years. During the ascendency of Sriwijaya, which dated from 672, the Cailindra (sic) dynasty used its strong naval and commercial fleets to spread its influence from its capital at Palembang in Sumatra to all parts of the Indonesian archipelago, promoting trade and fostering art and learning. With the decline of Sriwijaya at the end of the 13th century, a short period of disorder ensued with a number of former vasal states contending for hegemony. Eventually, Mojopahit, founded in East Jawa, succeeded in knitting together the various kingdoms and ruled the archipelago for two hundred years until 1520. In that year, this second empire disintegrated into several Moslem kingdoms, and it is likely that these would once again have reconstituted themselves as a single political unit in time. Before such a consolidation could be accomplished, however, the disunited kingdoms were confronted by the arrival of the Europian colonial power. (p. 12)"

The message contained here is very clear, that is, that East Timor is historically part of Indonesia. But the missing link had to be expressed in the subjunctive mood, which ultimately means that the proposition is historically untrue.

Kristiadi's article on decolonization of East Timor contains the same kind of message.

"East Timor is part of Timor Island, one of the islands of the Nusantara Archipelago, which since time immemorial constituted a geopolitical entity." (p. 551)

"The third alternative which had become the aim of Apodeti was the integration of East Timor into the Indonesian Republic, which is called by Apodeti as a "Return to the

Fatherland." (p. 551)

"Kembali kepada pangkuan Ibu Pertiwi" (Return to the lap of the Motherland) might be the Indonesian expression that Kristiadi is refering to here. As far as the East Timorese are concerned, this theme is clearly an Indonesian illusion. But most Indonesians and many Japanese as well don't understand why East Timor wants to be a separate country from Indonesia.

We also need to notice the use of the word "Nusantara" in the above passage. Nusantara is a Sanscrit word consisting of "nusa" (island) and "antara" (between) and it means Archipelago. "Nusantara" used to be popular among those who didn't like the word "Indonesia" in the pre-independence period because of its nationalistic connotation. But now it has a somewhat nostalgic tone because it connotes eternity not like "Indonesia" which is man-made.

Concluding Remarks

What we have here, then, a vicious circle. All the sloganistic phrases and expressions form a self-contained rhetorical cosmos. Perhaps at the center of this closed system lies Indonesian nationalism, which is somewhat anachronistic, although it is not itself to blame. Now, however, voices of concern about decaying nationalist sentiments, particularly among the Indonesian youth, are being raised by elder national leaders, especially military men. Defense Minister Edi Sudradjat's professed concern about de-humanization, de-spritualization and de-nationalism (de-humanisasi, de-spiritualisasi dan de-nasionalisme) is one such example. (*Kompas*, May 22, 1993) These fears may not be groundless, for it seems that a part of the Indonesian new generation are more aware of this situation and also have a pretty good idea about what is happening in East Timor. Whether this unreversable course of history can melt the hard-core collective illusion in the near future is a question yet to be answered.

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